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DE RUEHCI #0023/01 0181207
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1836
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE USD FAS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0072
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2247

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000023

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT PLS PASS TO CDC-NCOX, SBLOUNT AND TO HHS-STEIGER, HICKEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [IN](#) [KHIV](#)
SUBJECT: AI IN WEST BENGAL - SITREP FOR JANUARY 18.

REF: KOLKATA 14, KOLKATA 17, KOLKATA 19

KOLKATA 00000023 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) Summary: Econ FSN traveled on January 18 to Margram in Birbhum district. As of the morning of January 18, approximately 24,852 birds had been culled in the districts of Birbhum and S. Dinajpur. Culling operations are slow because the villages and farms are spread out over a large distance, and because villagers remain mistrustful about getting compensation. GOWB Control Room officials told Post that there have been no reported cases of bird flu-like symptoms among humans so far. The state government is still waiting for the test results of the samples taken from the Murshidabad, Burdwan, Nadia and South 24 Parganas districts, but has begun culling operations in Murshidabad. State officials have started inspecting Kolkata's poultry farms and issuing information leaflets about AI. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Econ FSN traveled on January 18 to Margram in Birbhum district. He witnessed culling operations, but reported that chicken and ducks from backyard poultry farms were freely roaming the streets. The culling carried out by 58 Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) in Birbhum and 26 RRTs in South Dinajpur district is proceeding at a slow pace due to a reluctance of poultry owners to give up their birds. The poultry farms in the affected areas are spread out over a wide area, and are the only means of livelihood for a majority of the villagers. Many fear that the compensation promised by the state government will take months to reach them, if it does reach them at all. Cullers are handing over official compensation receipts to the poultry owners which the latter will have to exchange for cash from the local village office within the next three months. Some poultry owners felt that if they had been given immediate cash compensation resistance to the culling operations would have been less severe. Post reported previously that cash had been sent to the local village offices in the affected districts. Poultry farmers told Econ FSN that those with connections to the political leaders would be paid first and that some feared not being compensated at all.

3. (SBU) In Margram, culling operations were delayed by over three hours after government health workers, affiliated with the ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) employees' union, staged a protest alleging that policemen had assaulted one of their leaders. Later in the day the workers withdrew their protest and culling resumed. Econ FSN also found that there is a general lack of awareness about avian influenza and the methods by which the disease spread. Culling sites are not cordoned off, and anyone can approach the areas where the birds are being culled. Econ FSN witnessed crowds of people standing

and watching the culling operations.

¶4. (SBU) As mentioned reftels, besides Birbhum and South Dinajpur, over the past two days unusual poultry deaths have been reported in Murshidabad, Burdwan, Nadia and South 24 Parganas districts. The samples taken from dead birds in these areas have been sent to the High Security Animal Disease Laboratory (HSADL) in Bhopal and the National Institute of Virology in Pune. Test results are expected within a couple of days.

¶5. (SBU) In Kolkata, the poultry market is witnessing a gradual drop in poultry purchases. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation has formed seven surveillance teams, each headed by a veterinary officer, to inspect all poultry markets in the city for signs of avian influenza among the birds. According to Chief Municipal Health Officer of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation Deb Dwaipayan Chattopadhyay, 25,000 chicken samples from various retail markets across the city have been checked and no suspected cases of bird flu have been found. Information leaflets on bird flu have been printed in Bengali, Hindi and English and have been sent to borough offices in the city for distribution to raise awareness about the disease and to prevent the spread of panic among the citizens. CM Bhattacharjee commented that the situation was "alarming" and repeated the information carried in newspapers about affected districts.

¶6. (SBU) In neighboring Jharkhand state, some unusual poultry deaths were reported by the media on January 17. The Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) of Jharkhand informed Post that about 20-22 chickens died in Pakur district of the state which borders West Bengal's Birbhum district. The joint director of Jharkhand's AHD said that AHD's investigating team found the dead chickens in scattered areas as there are no poultry farms in Pakur. The team collected samples from the dead birds and is sending it to Bhopal for testing. So far no confirmation of bird flu has been reported from Jharkhand. The Jharkhand government officials in Ranchi are reportedly in regular contact with the district magistrates of districts bordering West Bengal

KOLKATA 00000023 002.2 OF 002

and are on the look out for any unusual incidents of mortality among birds.
JARDINE